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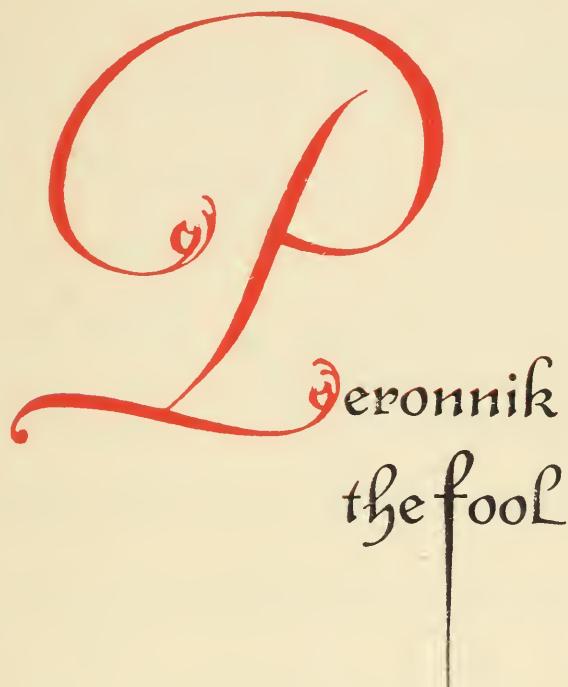
PERONNIK THE FOOL



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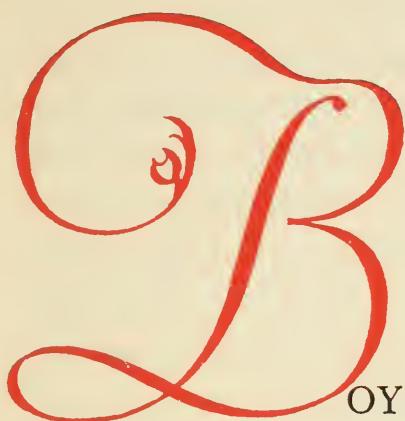
NEW YORK

NOTE

In my narrative of Héloïse and Abélard it is related that Héloïse wrote a story in French prose entitled *Peronnik the Fool* so that she might teach her son French [he had been away in Brittany for a long time and come back to her speaking Breton]. But the story, had it been included in the published book, would have distracted the reader's attention from Héloïse's own story. It may be that in some future edition of Héloïse and Abélard the story will be included.

G. OM.

Chapter 1.



OY or youth, which was he?

Héloïse could not remember, only that he was allowed to beg his living from door to door, everybody throwing him a crust when there was one by that did not seem wanted, and, when he grew stronger, claiming the right to send him to the well, to give him an adze to chop wood in the backyard, and to pay him for his day's work with broken meats and two sheaves of straw to lie on in a barn. Everybody's drudge, she said, and nobody taking thought to teach him a trade, not caring even to ask him who his parents were or what manner of life his was before he strayed into the village of Saint-Jean-de-Braie. A mere child of seven or eight, she continued as she sat in the convent library biting the end of her quill.

And having recalled all she had heard in Brittany of his story, her pen kept pace with her

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memories of Peronnik—how he had wandered out of the forest and had since forgotten everything except the forest, whither it was still his wont to return (compelled, maybe, by some homesickness), sometimes staying away for three or four days, setting the folk talking, asking each other if they had lost their Peronnik for ever. She had heard that he once stayed away so long that the folk had gone forth to seek him, getting tidings of him as they passed through the fringes of the forest. He passed us by at day-break, singing like a lark in the morning, the woodmen cried; and these tidings were enough for the searchers, who turned back, saying, We shall find him begging his breakfast from somebody, and from us he'll get the thrashing he deserves for having put us to such pains. Why, there he is! cried one, in the doorway of Farmer Leroux's house. Whereupon they stood waiting, fidgeting at their sticks, whilst Peronnik enjoyed such cheer as he could get out of a wooden bowl that all the spoons of the house had already been over. As he scraped and picked the clotted meal from the sides he talked so pleasantly, flattering the goodwife so well that she bethought herself of some crusts in her cupboard and returned with her hands full, throwing them one by one into the bowl, for which Peronnik was thankful, gobbling them up with such good appetite that a knight in armour

riding by could not do else than rein in his horse to watch him.

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Thou hast a hungry boy with thee, he said, addressing the housewife. And well might he be hungry, she answered, for not a bite nor a sup has passed his lips these three days or more. Which is it, Peronnik, three days or five? Peronnik held up his hand, for his fingers were his accounts. Five days, as much as that, said the housewife. And with nothing in my belly but berries, of that I am sure, said Peronnik; and the housewife began to tell the knight of the mischief, how searchers had gone forth to seek him in the forest. And are still seeking him, maybe. . . . But, in troth, they are back again, having gotten tidings of him. You see them at yon house, waiting till you've gone, sir, to come hither to enquire out his adventures. So he knows the forest? the knight asked. As none other knows it, she answered, laughing, and began to tell stories of Peronnik's rambles, the knight cutting her short, saying, If he be knowledgeable in the forest paths, he is the boy I am looking for; and, turning to Peronnik, he asked him if he could tell the way to the Grey Castle. In the name of the Holy Virgin and God himself! cried the housewife, it cannot be that a noble knight like you, sir, should be going to the Grey Castle? By my faith, I am, the knight replied, if I can find it; for three months I have

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been seeking it, and for as many years my companions-in-arms have been on their way thither.

At these words Peronnik lifted his head from the wooden bowl out of which he was feeding, and with his eyes on the knight he hearkened, hearing that the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl were the greatest treasures the world could bestow on any man. For in the Golden Bowl, said the knight, he will find all food and drink that he may wish for and every kind of wealth. Faith and troth! that bowl is the bowl for me, said Peronnik to himself. Every kind of wealth, the knight continued, and also health, for if he eat and drink from the Golden Bowl he shall be healed, whatever his sicknesses may be; and though he may be dead, if not for more than three days, life will come back to him if the Bowl be put to his lips. What a wonderful bowl this is! said Peronnik. I would have it for myself. Well, tell us now about the Spear, good knight.

The Spear, the knight said, will destroy everything it touches. And who owns the Bowl and the Spear? asked Peronnik. Good knight, cried the housewife, you will not lead the poor boy astray? Ah! said the knight, so thou hast heard of the Bowl and the Spear. And thou too hast heard of them? he added, turning to Peronnik. And who would have heard of them if I hadn't? Peronnik answered, for I was born and bred in

the forest and have often seen in the days gone the enchantress Redemonde riding by, the Spear in rest and the Bowl at her girdle. But would she ride about the forest with the Spear and the Bowl? the knight asked, and this time it was the housewife who answered him. Faith, said the woman, the sorceress would be of no high degree in her arts if she left the castle without the Spear and the Bowl, for without them she would be no more than ourselves and it would be easy to invade her castle. Thou speakest well, woman, said the knight; none can prevail against her while she have the Spear. She lays the Spear aside when she enters the castle, continued the woman. And the Bowl and the Spear sink down into a vault with a door that no key can open but hers, said the knight; and my plan is to make show to fall in with her humour and to steal her keys while she sleeps. I have heard of plans no better and no worse than yours, sir knight, from many of your company that have passed by my house asking the way to the Grey Castle, but none of them returned from thence. Thou sayest well, answered the knight; none of them returned from the castle, for none of them took counsel of the hermit of Blavet. And did you do that, good knight? asked Peronnik.

I did indeed, replied the knight; and was told by him that a hard task was before me, for out of the Wood of Deceits, he said, will come to

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meet me all kinds of fears and terrors, and if my heart be staunch and I do not yield to them, flowers will bend down from their stalks and sweet perfumes assail my nostrils; at the end of the vistas fair, shadowy forms will beckon me, and if I follow them they will lead me into deserts where I shall perish from cold and hunger, like those that went before me. But if I pass, as I shall pass, through the Wood of Deceits in safety, I shall meet a dwarf waving a fiery dart which burns up everything around it within twenty paces of the apple-tree from which I must pluck an Apple. If I escape the flames and get the Apple, I shall have to go in search of the Laughing Flower, but to pluck this I must beguile a lion whose mane is of living snakes. I shall wait till the lion sleeps (the snakes are for ever wakeful, but I must get the Flower); and having gotten the Flower I shall seek a passage through the dragon-haunted lake, and on reaching the thither side a fight will begin between me and the Black Man, whose weapon is an iron ball that returns of itself to the master after every throw. After that I shall enter the Valley of Delights to conquer every kind of temptation with which the Devil may assail a Christian. My courage will weaken, but it will become strong again, for I shall resort to prayers and fare onwards till I come to a river by whose bank sits a lady clad in black. She will say to

me, Good knight, thou must carry me across the ford, for it is said I may not instruct thee on the hither side, but on the thither thou'lt learn from me what next thou hast to do. All these perils await me, said the knight, but I go to meet them without fear and asking no help from anybody but Peronnik, who will point out the way to the Grey Castle in the woods.

The goodwife would have stopped Peronnik from telling the knight the way, for her heart was moved at the thought that a man of good appearance and fair words should be lost to the world, which sadly needed such men, but before she could pluck the Fool by the sleeve he had pointed out the way to the knight, who at once pricked forward. Redemonde will get his life and his armour, the woman said, and was moved to pull Peronnik by the ears. But of what good to pull a fool's ears? she asked herself, and threw him instead two or three more crusts, bidding him go his way and never return to her again, for after his wanton words she hoped to see his face no more. Of reproofs Peronnik understood nothing, but he was used to being told to go his way, and he was about to do as he was bidden when the housewife caught sight of her husband coming across the fields. In an evil humour my good man comes to me, she said, his gait tells it to me plainly; and she began to ask herself, Has he come upon a lamb

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dead in the fields, or has the mare cast her foal? Before any words passed his lips Leroux's eyes fell on Peronnik, and he said, Now then, my boy, my neat-herd has gone for disobedience to my orders, and thou'rt the lad I want to take his place. At which the goodwife held her peace, for the time was not one to arouse his anger further; and she bethought herself of the great rise in life this was for Peronnik.

From that day Peronnik minded the farmer's cows, the white and the brown and the black, keeping them together in the pasture the farmer had told him they were to feed in, forgetful at first of the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl; stories did not stay long in Peronnik's head, and of all at the time he was in, for he had the weather to think of, and very bad weather it was, the country withering under a blue sky with never a cloud in it except the one that appeared about three o'clock every day and fled away southward, breaking Peronnik's heart. If the clouds do not gather and no more rain falls, whither shall I drive my cows to pasture? he said again and again, for there's little grass anywhere, and what there is is dry and crisped, with no diet in it. And whither shall I drive them for water? The pools that were are but baked mud, and the river that was is but heaps of hot shingle, with only a trickle round the middle rocks.

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And it was as Peronnik said, the country seemed to have fallen out of its luck. Rain is our need and without it we perish, was the cry of man and beast and bird. Even when the chains of the deepest wells were lengthened the buckets came up but half-filled. The spells of the sorceress have caused this drought, for we will not worship Satan with her, the folk replied to the knights who came riding by asking to be shown the way to the Grey Castle, everyone gathering a crowd of villagers about his saddle bow, crying, Let the Spear and the Bowl be raped from the sorceress else we perish. At which words the knights pricked on hastily, promising to return with both. But none returned, and the villagers fell into steady despair, saying, We are undone; we thirst in our houses and the cattle thirst in the fields even unto death; our hens thirst, and the ducks and the geese return from their quest for water sadly; the flowers wither in the gardens, and no honey will be gathered by the bees this season. We are undone utterly if rain do not fall. We have no armour to besiege the Grey Castle, and the knights who have armour meet their fate, for whosoever has the Spear is all-powerful. Will no true knight come who, by the power of God and his virtue, will overcome the sorceress? If we pray will he come?

And the folk fell to praying till some began

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to doubt if God's power availed against Redemonde. See, they cried, no knights come. Hast seen a knight? they cried to Peronnik, who came by, returning with his cattle from a distant river. Hast seen a knight journeying? Never a one, he answered; the sorceress has had them all. And in the river did thy beasts get their fill? They wetted their nozzles in the leavings of the birds, replied Peronnik, for thousands of birds have come down from the woods and have drunk up what remains of the Arduzon. We perish utterly, were the words that Peronnik heard wailed behind him, if no knight come to save us from the woman in the Grey Castle. Wicked above all other women she is, Peronnik said to himself, and continued on his way, asking himself why she sought to destroy the poor folk who had no castle to live in. What have we done, he said, to merit this revenge? And what have the poor cows, who in other days gave their milk so cheerfully, done to deserve her terrible hatred? And that he might think more fully he sat himself by the roadside. Another knight comes, he said, catching the sound of hooves, whom I shall direct to his doom; for Peronnik was not without a heart. But seeing that the horseman wore no armour, he said to himself, No knight is this one.

Why now, my lad, said the horseman, reining in his steed beside Peronnik, what grief is

this that sets such young eyes as thine weeping? Grief there is enough in the world for men and women, but for lads and lasses the world should be naught but songs and flowers. For what art thou weeping? I am weeping, good sir, Peronnik answered, for the witch of the Grey Castle in the wood has laid a curse upon the land. And who told these evil tidings of the lady in the Grey Castle? the knight asked. Good sir, replied Peronnik, I am but telling the stories that are told in the village. It may be that her ladyship knows none of these things, and that the curse that has fallen is not her curse. But if no rain fall within the next few days my cows and young heifers will lie down and die and be eaten by wolves. But the wolves, too, have to drink, said the knight, and he asked whither they went for it and learnt from Peronnik that the wolves knew of pools untouched by the curse lying far away in the depths of the forest. Hearken, sir, to that poor heifer calling me from the well-head, but were I to let down the bucket again it might come up dry. I have no heart to disappoint her, nor have I heart to see her die. I grieve for my cows and for my master, who will be as poor as I am this winter if the curse be not lifted from the land.

At these words the horseman covered his face with his hands, and Peronnik guessed him to be weeping. You are weeping, good sir, he

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said, for my dying kine; and if the ways of the forest be not known to you I will point them out, and maybe (though a knight you are not, for you wear no armour) the witch of the Grey Castle will listen to your prayers and give back the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl, and the country be saved from famine. Alas, Peronnik, I know the ways through the forest and need no guide. Look into my face and tell me if thou rememberest me. And that Peronnik might judge him better the horseman stepped down from the saddle and, leading his horse by the bridle, stood by Peronnik, saying, Look into my face and say if thou hast not seen it before. Good sir, said Peronnik, you are the knight who stopped to watch me cleaning out the porridge bowl when I returned from the forest. For as many days as I have fingers I was in the forest with naught but berries in my belly; I was hungry; and the goodwife was bidding me away, never to come to her door again for food or lodgings, for pointing out the way to you, sir. That day was a dark one for me, the knight answered, but for thee it was a bright day; for I have not forgotten Farmer Leroux coming from his fields angry at his neat-herd's disobedience to his orders, and, seeing thee, he said, Vagrant though thou art, I will trust thee till I find thee disobedient. My luck came, sir knight, just as you tell it. Such luck as mine never came

before to a hind like me, for those who were gone in search of me stood waiting at the corner of the street to beat me, as I heard afterwards. But, sir, your countenance is so rueful that I gather a great misfortune must have overtaken you.

A great misfortune truly overtook me, the knight replied; a knight without sword or shield or lance is indeed unfortunate even amid the unfortunate. And who robbed you of your armour? asked Peronnik. Myself robbed myself, was the answer that he got, and Peronnik sat wondering, for the knight bade him keep his seat, saying that it was he who should stand. But my crippled knee forbids it, he said, and I will sit beside thee instead on this fallen tree, and we will talk, Peronnik, of the day that I rode away confident into the forest in quest of the Grey Castle. You spoke, said Peronnik, about the Wood of Deceits and the Valley of Delights, through which you would pass with your eyes closed lest lovely shapen fairies—I have forgotten what the dangers were, sir knight, but did you overcome them and reach the castle? I did indeed, the knight replied, and so came into my misfortune. I remember my cattle and would know them among hundreds, said Peronnik, but have little memory for words, yet I have not forgotten that you said that whosoever owned the Golden Bowl would find in it all the food

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and drink and wealth he wished for, and that whosoever owned the Diamond Spear would be master of the world, for it destroys everything it touches. Whilst driving my cattle from pasture to pasture I have often thought that if I were a knight I would go in quest of the Spear and the Bowl and save my country from the curse that the woman in the Grey Castle has put upon it, without telling my thoughts to anybody, for were a word to go forth that I was thinking such things I would have all the village laughing at me. But you, sir knight, have not joined with the village against me? Joined with the village against thee, Peronnik? said the knight. Putting a joke upon me, answered Peronnik, for it is hard to believe that you passed through all the great perils you told us of and have come back from the Grey Castle without the Spear and the Bowl. It may be, Peronnik, that thine eyes have never dwelt with rapture upon a woman's beautiful face? Your words, sir knight, are hard for a neat-herd, a stray come into the village of Saint-Jean-de-Braie without a story to tell of his father or mother.

A woman's beautiful face! Peronnik repeated, and he asked the knight if all the beautiful ones were good and the ugly ones wicked. To which the knight replied that he would not go so far as to say that, but believed that a fine open countenance never foreshadowed a base

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soul, words that were too hard for Peronnik to find an answer for. Moreover, he was minded to ask the knight how he might know beauty when it passed him by, if it were sinful to be beautiful, and if men were beautiful as well as women, getting from the knight the answer that beauty was not given to men and women only, but was shared by the birds and the beasts. The lowing heifer approaching us, Peronnik, is beautiful. If you were milking her, sir knight, Peronnik answered, you'd have a different word for her, for however hard I pull at the teats I cannot fill the pail. Flowers are more beautiful than grass, said the knight. Not in my eyes, replied Peronnik, for I would give all the flowers in the world for a field of juicy grass into which I might turn my kine. Only great knights like you, sir, can praise milkless udders and set flowers above useful grass. Whilst seeking the Grail you turn verses as you ride about girls with rosy cheeks and white legs—Leaving the sallow faces and the tough skins songless, said the knight. But are there no lads in thy village whose hearts ache after rosy cheeks and white legs? There are many such, said Peronnik. But thou'rt not one of them? the knight asked. My mother may have kissed me, but I have no memory of her, Peronnik replied.

Rather than these things I would hear from you, sir knight, how you passed through the

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Wood of Deceits and the Valley of Delights. And cheated the dwarf, said the knight, who guards the apple-tree, and the lion whose mane is of live snakes. To have overcome such a beast as that you must be possessed of a great secret, sir knight, said Peronnik; for those who went before you had doubtless stout hearts, but a stout heart is not enough to overcome a lion whose mane is of live snakes. It is as thou sayest, Peronnik, for the snakes are wakeful, and when the lion sleeps a snake is always ready to awake him at the approach of danger. I went to the hermit of Blavet, who told me how I might deceive the lion and poison the dragons in the lake; but he gave me no secret to save me from the beauty of the Lady Redemonde, who came to my saddle bow to welcome me when I reached the castle, and held a goblet of sweet wine to my lips and pressed into my hand spiced cakes on a silver salver. These I might have resisted, but not her sweet smile nor the sunny gold of her hair. But of these things thou knowest nothing, Peronnik. Nothing indeed, Peronnik replied; much more of porridge and crusts, and not enough of them at the end of a hard day's work. But for the sake of my kine and of the village of Saint-Jean-de-Braie I would have turned my eyes from the cakes and wine and said, Sorceress, I have come for the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl. Then it may be, the knight said,

that thou art the lad I am seeking. Now, sir knight, you must be mocking me, for why should a knight, even one who has trespassed, seek such a boy as I am?

Thou wouldst hear, asked the knight, what happened to me? I would indeed, Peronnik answered, and the knight said, Besides the beauty of the Lady Redemonde there was music and dancing and sweet singing and fine linen in her castle, and I dallied with her in pleasure for several days. And when the day came for me to ride round the castle ramparts, the last task through which a knight must pass before he claim the Bowl and the Spear, my will was not free to conquer, and I rode weakly at the great abyss; and myself and my horse were thrown into it, my horse being killed and myself carried a cripple to the castle, where my limbs were mended as best they might be. And since then I have had no will but the will of the Lady Redemonde, whose power over me is such that I go forth at her bidding to lure other knights, knowing well that they will fail in the Wood of Deceits or the Valley of Delights, they not having gone to the hermit of Blavet, who will tell a good and true knight how he may secure himself against these dangers.

So you, sir knight, were the only one to reach the castle? Peronnik asked, and the knight answered that the others perished in the Wood or

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in the Valley, some, by the aid of heart-felt prayers, getting through those places, only to perish in the desert that lay outside. Thou'lt see their bones—But shall I have to go in search of the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl? Peronnik asked. If the country is to be saved, thou'lt have to go, replied the knight; possessed of the secrets that will bring thee to the castle unscathed. For all secrets are in my power for giving save how to harden thy heart against Lady Redemonde's beauty. I have that myself, said Peronnik, so think no more of it. But while I am away seeking the Spear and the Bowl who will let down the buckets in the wells and wind them up again? Think not of thy herd but of thy country, the knight replied; thy herd matters little, for the herds of all the world will be thine if thou returnest with the Spear and the Bowl. I am but a hind, sir knight, and would be driven away from her castle. We can put knighthood upon thee, the knight said. But, answered Peronnik, I should never dare to ride through the streets of Saint-Jean-de-Braie with a shield on my arm and a lance in my hand and a sword by my side, none of which I have had any practice with, all the boys and girls throwing things at me, saying, Lord! there goeth Peronnik, a greater fool than ever he was before. To which the knight answered that he could give Peronnik his horse only. Armour he had none,

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neither sword nor lance. She having taken mine from me. But, said Peronnik, I know where there is a lance and a sword and a shield and a helmet. You know that! cried the knight; well then let us go to find them. There may be no sword and there may be no shield and there may be no lance, answered Peronnik, but there's a helmet in a blasted tree on a heath. But this the knight could not believe, saying: How should a helmet have come down a hollow tree? It may be only one of Peronnik's thoughts, he said to himself, which are little considered in Saint-Jean-de-Braie; and they fared onward into the forest.



Chapter 2.



ND through shady dells, over sunlit hill-tops out of sight of watchers, out of hearing of eavesdroppers, the twain wandered, the knight in deep thought, Peronnik leading the horse half-forgetful of the Grey Castle and his approaching knighthood, happy in the enchantment of the forest, and at home in it even as the birds and animals.

At noon the knight dismounted, and whilst the horse grazed at tether he talked to Peronnik of the honour of knighthood and its duties, the chime of his words, of which Peronnik understood nothing, bringing sleep into Peronnik's eyes. But remembering, as he always did, that courtesy should be lacking in nobody, he struggled against the weariness that the warmth of the sunlight and the monotonous murmur of the forest imposed upon his eyelids, till the

knight's talk became in his mind a green and golden mystery, full of vague sounds, with somebody talking whose voice Peronnik had heard before in the streets of Saint-Jean-de-Braie, but whose name kept slipping from his memory, try hard as he might to remember it. And this was the last that Peronnik heard of the pardoner, who had stopped in front of the knight to rest for a while, the afternoon being hot and his pack heavy, and who, sitting on a fallen bole, had fallen to deplored the evil times, saying that he had traversed many villages without selling a single relic, and in a country renowned for its piety. And this pause of faith among the peasantry he set down to the drought, for having addressed themselves to God without avail the peasantry were now offering prayers to the Devil every evening in the Village of Saint-Jean-de-Braie, a favourite retreat for worship being a dusky garden or orchard. On the knight asking the reason for these conversions, the pardoner said that the folk had put aside the priest, saying that the same power could not be the creator of both good and evil. He had often heard mutterings among the crowd that collected about him: God is deaf; the Devil may have a readier ear to our prayers. He and the priest, though often at variance, were agreed that Devil-worship was of all sins the worst, and they had striven against the heresy. If he

had had some relics of the evil one, some clippings of the hooves and a few bristles or hairs from his hinder-parts, he could have driven a fine trade in Saint-Jean-de-Braie in these days of drought. But neither Satan nor Beelzebub nor any of the inferior fallen angels had abided on earth, so there was little of their bodies that he could collect; smells there were in plenty, but smells could not be collected. Moreover, he was not one of those who turned their backs on their benefactors. He had thriven in the belief that God was the creator of both good and evil and in this belief he would abide, selling only relics of the saints and holy men and women.

On these words the pardoner broke into an extraordinary enumeration of his wares, laying special stress on a bit of the sail of St. Peter's boat. And this not proving a temptation, he displayed teeth from the jaws of nearly all the Apostles; and as these did not tempt the knight he continued his prattle unavailingly till he produced a bunch of feathers plucked from the cock that crowed the morning of the day that Christ died, adding happily that any one of these would keep the wearer safe from the curse of the sorceress in the Grey Castle. Now is this true what you are telling me? the knight asked; shall my thoughts be safe from her, for she is a great reader of thoughts? As long as you wear this feather your thoughts will be your own, the

pardoner replied; and he picked the finest feather from the bunch and gave it to the knight in return for a piece of money. And then strapping his pack together he departed quickly, leaving the knight in a pretty humour of smiling satisfaction, for what he feared more than all else were Redemonde's eyes. But they will read no more from me, he muttered, for this feather I shall wear in my bosom. And calling upon Peronnik, who did not answer, the lad having rolled over asleep under a holly, he kicked him up and bade him lay his hand on the bridle and lead on to the hollow tree where the needed armour was hidden. Is our way to the right or to the left, to the west or to the east, to the north or to the south? the knight asked. Such questions as these Peronnik could not answer, and the knight, angered by his dulness of wit, was about to bid him away from him back to Farmer Leroux to get beaten for his neglect of the herd. But before he could speak the words, like one bidden from within, Peronnik seized the bridle of the knight's horse, and they went forward till evening, seeing only hawks at hover above the tree-tops and foxes slinking through the underwood. Only hawks and foxes have we seen, said the knight, since we started forth this morning, and Peronnik answered him that in all his forest faring he had never seen before the trees they were among. Nor this boulder, he said, nor yon stunted pines;

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it is not my forest but another. And the knight was about to lay his lance about Peronnik's shoulders, but kept himself from doing so lest he should run away; and Peronnik could easily outstrip him by dodging from tree to tree, passing under the thick bushes and round rocks where a horseman could not go. And were this to happen, he said to himself, I am lost indeed; Peronnik is my chance to escape from the forest.

And as courtesy is always better than hard words in such circumstances he spoke encouragingly to Peronnik, who fared on at hazard till the night was nigh upon them, when he cried out, Sir, yonder are three ravens just come up from the rocks. Yes, the knight replied, I see three black birds of ill omen in the air. Not so, answered Peronnik, this evening the ravens are birds of good omen, for their way is to their roosting-tree, and we have but to follow them to come upon the buried armour. Nor had they fared far when Peronnik began to remember the part of the forest he was in, and he begged the knight to take courage, saying that they were within a quarter of a league, or less than that, of the helmet he had heard the birds speak about. And the knight, putting confidence in Peronnik's wood-lore, fared onward with him in silence until the evening star burst into flame in the heavens and the tree was before them with the three ravens on its branches. It was from

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them, said Peronnik, that I heard of the armour hidden in the tree. So thou hast told me already, the knight answered; but what knowest thou of the talk of birds? More than you think for, sir knight, for there is a raven in Farmer Leroux's yard that speaks as plainly as you do; when he has hidden anything he goes hopping about, crying to us, Look here, look there, look everywhere, and the very same words I have heard the ravens in yon tree speak before tucking their heads under their wings. Now give your ear to them, sir knight, and what I tell you you will hear.

The knight listened to the chatter above in the branches, but he could not divide it into words for a long time, and once more he began to think that Peronnik was fooling him; all the same, he could not do else than listen to the birds. Now, sir knight, Peronnik whispered, tell me what you think you hear; and the knight answered, Methinks I hear one bird say, Look here, and the next answer: Look there, and the three cry together: Look everywhere, for the—Helmet is in the tree, Peronnik whispered; put your hand to your ear, sir knight. The knight raised his hand, hearing this time, so it seemed to him, the word helmet in the birds' talk. It may be as thou thinkest, Peronnik, that we are within reach of what we need to win the Bowl and Spear from the sorceress. So now up with

thee into the tree; as easy to climb it is as any ladder, and I will hoist thee into the first branches.

With a great clatter of wings and hoarse cries of anger the ravens flopped away into the forest, and Peronnik, reaching the hollow bole, looked down into it, crying to the knight, who waited below for tidings. The ravens have not lied to us; a helmet there is in the tree, and it being no more than six feet from the ground mayhap the rest of the knight is underneath it. Now why should the knight be underneath it and how could he be? asked the knight. None but a fool could think to find a live knight in a hollow tree. To which Peronnik replied, If he be not a live knight he must be a dead one. Thine answer is worthy of thee, said the knight, for a man is always alive or dead; and the helmet may have fallen from the knight's head as he looked down into the tree for buried treasure, to be caught midway. It may be that, answered Peronnik, or something worser, it being in his mind that the ravens would not trouble much about a steel helmet. Now what meanest thou by that something worser? And the two began to dispute together, the knight trying to persuade Peronnik to go down into the tree after the helmet, and Peronnik answering that if he did he might not be able to climb out of the tree again. Nor would you, sir, be able to lend a

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hand to get me out of the hole. My lame leg, it is true, replied the knight, unfits me for climbing. Whereupon they were friends again, with the knight taking advice from Peronnik, it seeming true to him that they would have to go to work with adze and saw to get the whole of the armour, if the whole of it—helmet, sword, shield, lance, and chain surcoat—were hidden in the tree. If you will remain by the tree, sir knight, said Peronnik, I will go whither I think I can buy an adze and saw; a hammer, too, it will be as well to bring. But without money thou'l not be able to buy these things, the knight answered, so I will give the money for them and for the many other things that we shall need, among them a leathern coat to wear under thy surcoat of mail; and to escape the several dangers that beset the way to the castle, to overcome the spells with which Redemonde has surrounded herself, thou'l need a linen bag, and let it be filled with larks' feathers—not sparrows, but larks, to be sure; some bird-lime, too, and a garland of roses—forget it not, nor a pipe made out of a stem of elderwood. These things come to my mind readily, but others will be needed, and I will tell them to thee and impress them upon thy memory as we journey to the village. Which is not far, Peronnik interjected. It will be well indeed that you accompany me thither, for—That I should go with thee, Peronnik, is a

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thought that has been in my head while speaking to thee. It's a good thought, too, for who would believe that I had gotten so much money honestly as you will have to give me? cried Peronnik. What story could I tell them, and of whom should I tell it? My name, said the knight, is Sir Gilles de Lacenaire.

Sir Gilles' straightforward speech reassured Peronnik, and he kept pace beside the knight's charger all the way, now and then clinging to the stirrup leather. And in this way they came into the village, where they were followed by eyes open with admiration, Sir Gilles' martial bearing overawing the women and children, the men, whose shrewdness might have led them to ask what business brought a knight and a shepherd lad to the village after sundown to buy saw and adze, being away in the harvest fields. The larks' feathers, the bird-lime, the pipe made out of elderwood, and the garland of roses awakened astonishment, but it was enough to remember that knights were not as other men. And so favoured Sir Gilles and Peronnik returned to the heath with all they needed, and once arrived they came to their work without delay on the blasted tree, putting to flight the ravens, who had returned thither. We are well rid of those croakers, who have tongues in their beaks to tell all they see and hear, said Peronnik. Thou art not the fool that I thought thee, Peronnik; a

mind is awakening in thee. And without more words Sir Gilles dealt the hollow tree some great blows with the adze; but the tree was tougher than they thought for and yielded but little. Our work will take us till daybreak, he said, and spat upon his hands to get a better grip of the slippery handle. Peronnik worked with chisel and hammer, and when he and Sir Gilles stopped to take breath they saw the moon rising into the pure summer sky, sending long shadows of the tree over the heath. It may be that the evil birds are roosting in yonder wood and watching us; if so, it would be well to drive them out of it, said Peronnik. On this errand they went and drove the ravens further away lest they should have the story to tell to whomsoever might listen to them in the morning; and hearkening from time to time to birds winging their way high overhead to some pool or mere known only to themselves, where they would stay till morning, and to the footfalls (foxes and badgers, mayhap) they plied adze and saw. Once the tread was heavier and Peronnik whispered, A bear. My horse, said Sir Gilles, has winded him; and they clung to the horse's bridle, striving to quieten him with words, but he plunged out of their hands and nearly broke his tether. If we had lost him! Sir Gilles muttered, leaving the rest of his thought to be spoken by Peronnik, who said, It would be a bad luck indeed if we

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were to lose our horse now, for if the morning light makes a knight of me I must have a horse to take me to the Grey Castle. And if we had lost mine, where should we have found another? Sir Gilles asked, for all my money is now spent. If that be so, said Peronnik, we would do well to light a fire, for if wolves be about (and there's no reason why they are not on the prowl) your horse will break his tether; there is naught that a horse fears like the smell of a wolf. Thereat the twain set to work to build a fire, and having done this they returned to the tree and worked for another hour or more.

We are just on daylight, said Peronnik, and when Sir Gilles asked him how he knew that daylight was nigh, Peronnik pointed to the stars, saying, They are no longer near us, Sir Gilles, for they follow the night; and he asked Sir Gilles if he did not feel a chilliness in the air. Sir Gilles answered that the sky was greyer, and Peronnik pointed to a heron flapping through the greyness on his way to the reeds that the ducks had left for the corn-fields, where he will bide all day. All the noises of the night have ceased, Sir Gilles said, and they fell once more to their work, chopping and hacking and breaking the old tree away in parts, without, however, being able to widen a hole big enough to allow the tree to be searched to the roots. And it was not till the line of the forest began to show under a

streak of green sky that they discovered a skeleton in armour. So it was the smell of the corpse that drew the ravens to the tree, said Sir Gilles. And the birds mighty angry at not being able to get a bite out of him, Peronnik answered. Are we on the spot where some foul murder was done and the body hidden in a hollow tree? Sir Gilles said, speaking more to himself than to Peronnik. Or the knight may have climbed into the tree to take counsel from the ravens and toppled into the hole, answered Peronnik, and once down in it, it would take a chimney-sweeper, and the best in France, to get out again. It may be as thou sayest, Peronnik, and weighed down by his armour he perished. We all perish, said Peronnik, one way or the other, leaving our goods behind for another's use and benefit, maybe for an enemy's. The armour we have gotten is of more worth than thy moralities, Peronnik. Now into it. Upon thy head I place the helmet and over thy shoulders the mail surcoat reaching to the waist. Thy shoon are stricken, but thy excuse to the lady of the Grey Castle will be that thou hast been long on thine errand.

With his sword by thy side and his shield on thine arm, kneel before me, and with a blow of my sword I will dub thee Sir Peronnik, and bid thee arise to start on an adventure in which many have fallen but in which thou'l't win renown. Hie thee into thy saddle, and as my brok-

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en knee does not allow me to walk far I'll seat myself behind thee, telling thee how to manage the charger, how to turn him to the right or to the left, how to rein him in, and how to escape the spells with which thy way will be beset on entering the Wood of Deceits and the Valley of Delights. To escape the dangers of the way I can help thee, but the greatest danger is the sorceress, and from her spell the purity of thy heart will save thee. It was then her beauty that caused your downfall, Sir Gilles? To which Sir Gilles answered furtively that it was the man within him that yielded to the wiles of Redemonde. Then there is no danger for me, Peronnik replied, for the man is not yet born within me. But I would hear of the wiles and the spells she casts upon the knights. The spell of her beauty, answered Sir Gilles, which is everywhere, in her hands, in her hair, in her eyes, in her foot; at which Peronnik was perplexed. But if you know not, sir, how the knights were beguiled, you can tell me what spell she cast upon you, for you are a true and valiant knight and must have yielded to some mightier force than her foot.

The traps, Sir Gilles answered, that the sorceress sets are manifold, and she never sets the same trap twice. But before telling of the trap in which I was caught, it behoves thee to hear that the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl were brought from Palestine in a ship by the Crusad-

ers; and that tidings of the argosy were wafted to a great magician in Italy, Rogéar, brother of the sorceress Redemonde, who by his spells called the vessel on the rocks, thereby possessing himself of a talisman that gives him power over the whole world. And how is it, asked Peronnik, that Rogéar has yielded his power to his sister? He has not yielded it, Sir Gilles answered, for they share it together; sometimes the Spear and the Bowl are in France, sometimes in Italy; at which answer Peronnik was perplexed and subdued. But brightening a little, he said, Well, Sir Gilles, tell me of the trap that laid you low, to which Sir Gilles answered, She invited me first to a great feast, and after we had eaten and drunken she called me to her side, and, having confidence that my prayers would save me from the snare of her beauty, I gave ear to the lulling music of her voice, till in the middle of a story a great noise was heard—voices in the courtyard of the castle and afterwards trampling of feet on the stairs. My brother, Rogéar, has returned, she said, and if he finds thee with me he will kill thee or change thee into some animal shape. But I love thee and will not open to him, and he cannot enter against my will, my spells being as strong as his. And myself, unsuspecting that the tumult and Rogéar's voice was but an enchantment of the senses wrought by Redemonde herself to bring me to her purpose, shook with ter-

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ror, half smothered by the stench of the Devil behind the door. At last hooves were heard departing, and we stood waiting till we could bear it no longer, and fell into each other's arms, my mouth upon her mouth.

I know not how the other knights were undone, but I was undone by the lifting of the dread that followed after Rogéar's departure. But let not my downfall dishearten thee, Peronnik, for thine innocence will cast a shield over thee. I shall be near thee, and though I know not all the snares she will set I can divine most of them; and when the snare is set for thee I will awaken thee by the shuffle of my feet, by a cough, or by words suddenly addressed to her. Many victories, however, will have to be won before thou reachest Redemonde. Yonder is the Wood of Deceits, through which thou'lt have to pass; and here we part. At these words Sir Gilles slipped from the horse's quarters, and with his hand on the bridle he sought in his memory, afraid that he had forgotten some danger that Peronnik would meet on his way to the castle. But in his thoughtfulness his hand loosened on the bridle and the horse sprang forward, and no sooner were the first trees passed than the predicted dangers began to appear, and Sir Peronnik could think of no better way to save himself from the allurements of the flowers than to pull his visor over his eyes, in this way shunning the

danger of sight. But the delicious scent of the flowers penetrated the woof of his armour, causing him to reel in his saddle, and he said, I must draw breath through my mouth, and he rode through the wood in safety till he came upon a great plain on the thither side littered with the skeletons of many men and horses and pieces of rusty armour. The bones of those, said Peronnik, who were beguiled by visionary hosts, so Sir Gilles told me, images of beauty to which my eyes have never been opened, and to which I hope my eyes will never be opened; for beauty must be in itself a gift from the Devil, since those who have it are wicked. Redemonde has it and she is a sorceress, and girls in the village that have it are often good for naught but decking themselves with ribbons, whilst those who have it not sit in the cottage doorways spinning their lives away in loneliness. Beauty therefore cannot be else than a gift from the Devil, since no good comes of it. From the beasts in the fields I learn the same lesson; the cow that gives but two pints of milk daily found more favour in Sir Gilles' eyes than the cow that gives two quarts. But what did he say? That beauty drew the world together, meaning thereby that without beauty the world would come to an end. But is that so?

And Sir Peronnik bethought himself of the spring season, which is always a season of bleat-

ing and lowing in the fields and singing in the woods. The ram and the yoe, he said, know naught of beauty, nor the birds in the branches, so it is not beauty that draws the world together. At that moment his eyes caught sight of two butterflies on love's quest high up in the blue air, and he said, Even the insects are drawn together, but not by beauty, for if I know little of beauty the butterflies must know less, for a fool is wiser than an insect. The beasts and the birds, and for aught I know, the fishes, he said, come to no harm, likewise monks and nuns; but not the good knights in search of the Bowl and the Spear, every one of whom has fallen, even Sir Gilles.

Sir Gilles had told him that though many had failed to get the Spear and the Bowl from the sorceress a pure knight would get them, one who had never looked yearningly into a woman's face nor sought a woman's kisses, if such a one could be found. Sir Gilles thought that he, Peronnik, was such a one, for he had strayed out of the forest without knowledge of his father and mother. Never before had the thought come to him that his father and mother met as all things that fly or walk, crawl or swim, meet, and that if his father and mother had not met he would not be. Only by the recovery of the Spear and the Bowl would God's purposes be justified. For God's ends he had come to be, and for God's ends

Nature's secret was withheld from him. Would he live and die without knowing it, or would the knowledge that all possessed but he fall upon him suddenly? Let it not fall, he prayed, till I reach the castle and wrest the Spear and the Bowl from the sorceress. Till then, Holy Virgin, let me be without the knowledge, and, if it be your will, for ever afterwards. And as he rode he prayed to the Virgin for help, vowing himself to honourable chastity, saying, Let all be as you will it, Lady of Heaven; you'll be my guide now and for ever, he said, raising his eyes.

At that moment a scream hoarser than that of a sea-crow interrupted his meditation, and he saw a fair green meadow with an apple-tree in the middle of it. The very apple-tree, no doubt, said Peronnik, from which Sir Gilles told me I must pluck the Apple; and there is the dwarf preparing to launch his dart at me. So he doffed his helmet, and the dwarf, who was not accustomed to such courtesy, hesitated, and Peronnik had an opportunity of addressing him. Let me pass, dear little friend, he said, for I am the new bird-catcher that my Lady Redemonde has engaged to snare the birds that are robbing her garden. She has told you of my coming? She has told me nothing about it, said the dwarf, and I read a lie on your face. If you continue to flourish your dart, good sir, my horse will rear and throw me, but if you'll lay it aside and come

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hither you will discover the Lady Redemonde's crest on the accoutrements that my horse wears. And these words seeming fair to the dwarf he laid aside his dart and examined them, and finding the Lady Redemonde's name engraved upon them he began with a changed mien to ask Peronnik if he had brought the bird-lime with which to catch the birds that infested the apple-tree. You must think me a fool indeed to come without it, answered Peronnik, and alighting from his horse he began to smear the branches; and when this was done, pretending that he needed the dwarf's help to hold the end of the twine out of which he was weaving a snare, he said, Put your head into the bag, good sir. And the dwarf, being now unsuspecting, did as he was bidden, and as soon as the bag was over his shoulders Peronnik tied the snare up so tightly that the dwarf could not scream. His struggles grew fainter, for the holy water in which the bag had been dipped kept the knot tight, and Peronnik had time to pluck the Apple and ride on his way.

It was very soon after leaving the meadow and the apple-tree and the dwarf dead beneath it that Peronnik found himself in front of a beautiful garden, in which were roses of all colours, and he said to himself, This is the garden in which the Laughing Flower grows; but how shall I pass the lion with the mane of snakes?

And well might he ask himself that question, for he had barely reached the garden gate when he was met by a great lion with all his snakes hissing furiously. But courtesy, said Peronnik, is never lost, even upon a lion; and doffing his helmet he addressed himself to the lion with fair words, asking the beast after himself and his family, and begging to be directed forthwith to the Grey Castle. Now what do you seek in the Grey Castle? growled the lion, and Peronnik answered, I am the bringer of the gift of a pasty of larks for my Lady Redemonde. Larks! said the lion, licking his chops, I have not tasted larks for many hundred years. Have you any larks to spare? Plenty, said Peronnik, for this sack is full of larks; and he began to imitate the twittering of larks, which he did so well that the lion was deceived. Look in and see how many larks there are, the lad said, opening the sack. The lion thrust his head therein and Peronnik drew the cord tightly, just as he had done about the dwarf's neck.

After plucking the Laughing Flower Peronnik rode to the dragon-haunted lake rejoicing, and seeing no bridge whereby he might cross it, he drove his horse into the water, saying to himself, Horses swim very well and as good as a boat mine will be to me. Nor was he deceived in this, for his horse bore him as well as any boat. But half-way across the lake the dragons began

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to swarm about him with gaping jaws, unable, however, to swallow him, for when their jaws were about to snap him up Peronnik plucked a rose from his garland and threw it down the black gullet; and immediately after swallowing the rose the dragon turned over and sank to the bottom, just as Sir Gilles had told him, advising him, however, never to throw a rose vainly; every one he threw must find its mark, for the dragons were very plentiful in the lake.

After crossing the lake Peronnik came to a valley which was guarded by a Black Man armed with an iron ball, who was chained by his feet to a rock. A terrible monster he was, with eyes all round his head, six of them in number, so that it mattered little on which side Peronnik stood, for the Black Man could see him; and he remembered that if the man's eyes fell upon him he would fling the ball before Peronnik could say a word. So dismounting Peronnik crept up, and hiding himself carefully behind bushes and rocks till he was within a few yards of the Black Man, he began singing the Church Service. He had not reached the end of the Introit before one of the eyes fell asleep, a couple more closed at the Kyrie, another began to wink when he was half-way through the Credo, and by the time he had reached the Magnificat all the eyes were shut.

And after assuring himself that the Black Man

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was sound asleep Peronnik led his horse through the Valley of Delights, in great perplexity, it is true, for along the pathways were tables, and the savoury smell of the meat and wine rose to his nostrils, tempting him. But Peronnik knew he could overcome these temptations, for Sir Gilles and himself had eaten well of the food purchased overnight. More than of gluttony he was afraid that the sense he lacked might be revealed to him suddenly, and that with increased knowledge he might become prone, like his predecessors, to the temptations of the maidens who beckoned and called to him from the stream in which they were bathing and from the trees under which they danced. Come and join us, they cried; and their shapes and voices were so soft and sweet that the thought came to Peronnik to tether his horse and mix with them; but he invoked all the saints of Brittany to his help, and the faint thought passed out of his mind altogether when he made the sign of the cross, which he did again and again. But in spite of his invocations and his signs his horse's hooves went slower and slower till he bethought himself of dismounting and cutting a bough from a tree to belabour him with. If he had done this he might have fallen a prey to the maidens, for they continued their beguiling dances through the mazy ways of the gardens and the orchards in front of him all the way to the castle. At every

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step his horse took the voices seemed to grow sweeter, and to escape from the temptation (which was not really upon him, but which might fall upon him at any moment) he began to play on his pipe of elderwood; and to save his eyes from looking at the maidens' shapes he fixed them on his horse's ears steadfastly, and was able to pursue his way in safety through the Valley, the most dangerous of all trials except the sorceress herself.

On emerging from the Valley he came upon the Ford at which the Black Lady, of whom he had heard from Sir Gilles, sat, and though her face was dusky yellow, like that of a Moor, he offered to carry her across the river. I thank you, good knight, for your courtesy, she said. All your companions fled from me. I am sorry, Peronnik answered, that my companions-in-arms should have been lacking in courtesy. Then the lady mounted before him and they went into the water together, and when they were midway in the stream the lady asked Peronnik if he knew who she was. Not I, said Peronnik, but by your mien and raiment you would seem to be a noble and mighty lady. Noble I may be, for my race dates from the fall of Adam, and mighty also, for all the world would retreat from me, all except you, sir knight, in whose heart there is still innocence. Know, sir knight, that I am the Plague. At which words Peronnik sought to

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draw himself away from her, and was about to throw himself from his saddle into the stream when the lady said, Fear nothing, for the one I am seeking is not you, sir, but the sorceress Redemonde, who, though immortal, will become subject to death if she eats of the Apple which you plucked from her tree, grown from a seed of the Tree of Good in the Garden of Eden. Let her taste of that Apple and I have but to touch her and she will die at once. But how shall I find the Bowl and the Spear? asked Peronnik, for I hear she keeps them underground in a vault to which there is no key. The Laughing Flower, said the Plague, can open all doors and make bright the darkest corner in the world. Well,

 said Peronnik, I will do as I am
 bidden, and if I can get you
 the sorceress's life you
 shall have it.



Chapter 3.



OW whilst Peronnik was performing the aforesaid great deeds Sir Gilles lay in very direful plight beneath an oak-tree in the forest, unable to move by reason of his broken or disjointed knee, which he had forgotten whilst giving last instructions to Peronnik, holding on as he talked by the stirrup leather. His last words to the new knight were that he must hold himself forbidden from any food or drink that might be offered to him in the Grey Castle. And these words had barely passed his lips when the horse began to plunge and to strike out with his forelegs, and to escape the dangerous hooves Sir Gilles loosened his hand on the bridle. A moment after the Wood of Deceits engulfed Peronnik, and Sir Gilles set out to walk to the castle, distant about half a league, he judged it to be; far too far for him to walk, as his knee soon began to warn him, till at last he could not do else

than fling himself upon the ground, overpowered by the pain.

As the pain in his knee dwindled thoughts began of Peronnik arriving at the castle before him, for the lad would not succumb to the singing of the maidens—he was sure of that; but his youth, while protecting him from some temptations, would leave him more susceptible than a man to those of the fruit and honey cakes that the sorceress would offer him; the cups of sweet wine, too, she would raise to his lips might tempt him after his long ride. And were he to yield a search would be begun for the lost Sir Gilles at once, who, when he was found, would be brought back to the castle and laid by the heels in some dark dungeon amid damp and rats, for the sorceress was without mercy for those who sought to thwart her. Peronnik would be exalted in his place (a poor exaltation!), for when she was weary of him she would send him, just as he was sent, to beguile other knights to their doom.

All seemed lost to Sir Gilles till he remembered the plume from the tail of the cock that crew after Peter's third denial that he knew not Christ, a relic so powerful, the pardoner had told him, that it would protect his thoughts from Redemonde's knowledge, though he were in the sorceress's presence, and himself from any danger he might find himself in. But the forest

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would be searched and his relic taken from him if he did not reach the castle before Peronnik. Need brings a man courage, he said, and climbing to his feet Sir Gilles started on the journey, but had not gone far when the pain again brought him to the ground; and searching in his bosom for his relic he drew it forth and besought Jesus, reminding him that he had never doubted his power to be above that of Satan. Help me in this great extremity, he cried, and the words had barely passed his lips when his eyes were directed to a broken branch that he had not seen before, and out of which an excellent crutch could be made. It lay some little distance away, and while dragging himself slowly to it he prayed with such good effect that the branch lent itself to be trimmed into a crutch even easier than he thought for; and having a sharp knife in his girdle he made it into an excellent crutch, by the help of which he hobbled to the castle, reaching it, to his great joy, before Peronnik. For, said he to himself, if Peronnik were before me Redemonde would be sitting with him, whereas she is sitting by herself on the terrace muttering her spells, counting them over and taking great joy from them one by one, for all the world like a countess in front of her jewel-box.

But I must fortify myself, he said, and stopping behind a lilac-bush he addressed himself to St. Peter, whom he had almost forgotten till

now. By virtue of the relic in my bosom, he muttered, the plume from the tail of the cock that warned thee of thy sin, I beg thee to go to him with whom thy lot was cast on earth, and with whom thy lot is cast in Heaven, and bid him strengthen me in adversity; bid him give me courage and foresight to overcome the sorceress, the ally of Satan; tell him that her belief is that while God rules in Heaven Satan rules the earth, gaining in power daily, that very soon the demons will be under the battlements of Heaven again, at war with the Cherubim and Seraphim. The saints, male and female, are all on my side, said Gilles to himself; it is a match between Heaven and earth, between God and Satan. And may all the saints and the Holy Virgin herself protect me from her if she should guess that I gave my horse to Sir Peronnik, unless indeed I invent a tale that will seem to her truthful. A better story I shall not find than that Sir Peronnik's horse reared and fell backwards and escaped before the knight could recover his feet, being unused to and hampered by his armour. His youth will awaken pity in her, he said; she will ask for news of him.

And being now out of the shelter of the lilac-bush, Sir Gilles was mindful to whistle a tune to start Redemonde out of her brooding of wicked spells; and he continued to whistle till she raised her eyes, but the sun was in her eyes and she put

up her hand to shade them. Sir Gilles continued for a few more bars till Redemonde rose to her feet and started to meet him, saying to herself, The minstrel can be none other than my own cripple! How is it, said Redemonde, that thou comest to me on a crutch instead of a horse, and in such great pain that to-morrow will be spent in thy bed? But how did she know that I was in pain? Sir Gilles asked himself, for he was always suspicious when with her. It is written in my face, maybe, he added; and to discover if his thoughts were known to her he kept his eyes upon her face and, reading no knowledge of them upon it, he said, My relic holds good. And with greater courage than he believed himself to be possessed of he began to prattle the story already arranged in his mind for telling. My relic, said he to himself, is more powerful than her spells; and he prattled on, lengthening his story out till she, wearying of it, picked up her magic mirror and looked into it for news of Peronnik.

He must have passed the dwarf and the lion and the dragon-haunted lake and the river, too, she said, rising from her seat, for hark, the sirens are singing. He will not listen to them and will arrive safely, be not afraid, Sir Gilles answered. We must prepare to welcome him, she said; come with me and bind up my hair, for none but thee can do it beautifully. I would wait here

to meet him, Gilles answered, at which Redemonde's face flushed, and she bade him follow her, saying that she would change her raiment. None knows like thee which is most becoming to me. See, my hair is coming down. Come, Gilles, I need thee to bind up my hair; come at once. It is the last time I shall perform these servile duties for her, Sir Gilles muttered, for though I have pandered to her pleasures wickedly, my love of her shall not turn me into her maid-servant.

On the threshold of the portal they stayed their steps for a moment, and at the same moment the Black Lady asked Peronnik's leave to descend from his horse, saying that she would follow him to the castle.

So Sir Peronnik rode alone up the lawns that encircled the castle, where, after blowing the first fanfare, he waited, thinking that it would show little courtesy to the sorceress for him to blow a second. As if I wished to hurry her, he said to himself. But after waiting some minutes he bethought himself that she might not have heard the first, so he blew a second; and it was as he raised his horn to his lips to blow a third that Redemonde came from the castle to meet him, saying, In my mirror I have watched your triumphs, Sir Peronnik, over the dwarf and the lion. It was by the help of God and the Holy Virgin that I did these things, Peronnik replied,

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doffing his helmet, and I am glad to be of service to you, lady. But the ride round the ramparts, the greatest task of all, is still undone, and I would undertake it without delay, for the day is waning. But you would not, sir knight, attempt so hard a task on the day of your arrival without eating and drinking? And heedless of his denials she called to her maidens, who, bowing to signify their acceptance of her orders, entered the castle, to return soon after with jewelled dishes piled high with delicious cakes and wine in golden goblets. I thank you, lady of the castle, many times, Peronnik said, but the day is waning and I should be bringing back the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bowl to my village, where they are badly wanted. But a goblet of wine and a slice of cake will be welcome after your ride. The day is hot, Lady Redemonde, answered Peronnik, and he was about to partake of the refreshment, but the lightning flash of expectant triumph in the sorceress's eyes reminded him that he must not partake of meat or drink in the castle. Forgive me, lady, but I have not a moment to lose for a bite or a sup, he said, not even for the eating of this Apple, which I hope you will not refuse to accept; and he doffed his helmet while handing it to her. Redemonde put the Apple in her bosom and Peronnik's face wore an abashment. Which becomes him not ill, said Redemonde, covering

herself with her cloak coyly. Satan must look after his own, Peronnik said to himself, and if he doesn't the world will be none the worse without a wicked sorceress who has laid my country waste by her spells; and then aloud said, You will forgive me, lady, if I ask Sir Gilles, whom I see coming from the castle, the way to the ramparts. The way to the ramparts, Sir Gilles said, will be found by riding round the castle to the right; not very far, a little way round after passing the second tower, you will come upon a staircase of a hundred steps, which your horse will have to climb, and should he miss his footing he will not stop falling till he reaches the bottom. You hear what Sir Gilles says, Redemonde cried; but Sir Peronnik pricked on, and when he was out of sight Redemonde turned to Sir Gilles.

Now why didst thou tell him the way to the staircase? she asked. But he could not have failed to find it, and it would be no gain to thee that he should delay his ride, Sir Gilles answered, till to-morrow or the day after, for he has, as thou must have seen, little else in his mind except the quest of the Spear and the Bowl, and thy best chance that he shall get neither is that he rides to-night in the dusk.

Thinkest that he'll come to his death in the chasm? Redemonde asked. Sir Gilles did not answer, and heedless of his silence, as if she had

not noticed it, she began to ask him how it was that in passing through the Wood of Deceits and the Valley of Delights other knights, all but thou, were turned from their quests by some enticing vision, the spells of my brother Rogéar; but this one rode on unmoved, plucking an Apple from my apple-tree, despite my faithful dwarf, dead, alas, maybe! It is not by my will that he rides safely. How was it that this last adventurer overcame the lion and the dragons in the lake, and that his eyes did not kindle when we exchanged glances and no huskiness came into his voice when he spoke to me? Gilles, I fear impending doom. But thou'lt not desert me now? Thine eyes cloud and the wavering spirit finds an echo in me. Thou hast not faith in Satan and thine unfaith undoes my faith. My spells will be cast unavailingly.

And, leaving her whilom lover, Redemonde crossed the tessellated pavement towards a chamber that Gilles judged to be one of purifications, for on either side of the doorway were vases. Containing, no doubt, lustral water from the sacred river, he said, and to assure himself he moved towards them, but stopped, bewildered. Lost to me, she said, for ever in this world and the next. Did she speak of two worlds? And to which God am I to pray? Which is the stronger? Which do I love the better, my flesh or my soul? My flesh I know always, my soul only in rare

whisperings. But the minutes are going by and I must ally myself to one God or the other. The thought of a prayer to Satan frightened him, and finding that he could not repent his sins with Redemonde his eyes wandered round the temple, and he began incontinently to count the arcades that led hither. There are five, he said, and to his astonishment he remembered that the ceilings were of chalk ribbed with hard stone. But why do I think of chalk and hard stone, things of interest only to builders? Satan puts these thoughts into my mind, for he would accomplish my ruin. Whereupon he began to beseech God to give him strength to resist Satan. But Gilles' heart was dry and his God mute, and in great perplexity he began to consider the style of architecture in which the temple was built. In Ionian or Doric, one or the other, he said; and his thoughts went back to the ten Doric columns that supported the pediment. There are four more, he said, on either side, and the sanctuary is square and vaulted, and the roof is of tiles; and he began to examine the statues in the niches, recognising those of whom Redemonde had spoken to him.

From the statues his eyes wandered to the pictures with which the walls were decorated, each one representing men and women engaged in agriculture, wreathing vines from tree to tree, wains laden with corn, girls dancing in the vats,

crushing the grapes under their feet. And seeing two palm-trees carved in marble Sir Gilles asked himself why they were there, but remembered suddenly that the palm puts forth a branch every month and is therefore sculptured in Nature's temple. But Redemonde will be here in a few moments and all hope of escape for me will be lost. My soul will burn for ever, he cried; and his thoughts began to wander from the burning of souls to the lamps, the goblets, the cruets, the vases, the sprinklers, the mitres, the censers, the jewelled ornaments worn by the priests and priestesses of Satan, the timbrels, the trumpets, and the cymbals.

Along the walls were seats of silver and ivory, and in a great perplexity he strove to read the strange inscriptions interwoven through the pavement under his feet; and then forgetful of them he gave ear to the music with which the temple was slowly filling, voices coming from the arcades and the galleries! Devil music, he cried, for as his ears became accustomed to the rhythms he began to recognise them as litanies sung to an accompaniment of timbrels and flutes. And walking to the measure of the music, Redemonde came, her long, thick hair falling into ringlets, floating over her shoulders; a many-shapen and many-coloured crown decked her head, and a silver moon shone upon her forehead, on either side of which serpents writhed

amid ripe ears of wheat; her gown of shifting colours changed with every movement of the folds from the purest white to saffron-yellow, or seemed to catch the redness of flame; her cloak of deepest black was sown with stars and bordered with a luminous fringe; her right hand held a timbrel, which gave forth a clear sound, and in her left she carried a waxen image.

As she approached the brazier the singers seemed to Sir Gilles to have drawn nearer, or it may have been that his ears had grown accustomed to the music and could now distinguish individual voices and instruments; and the shapes, too, of those in the processions passing through the different arcades and aisles and grouped in the galleries grew precise and then melted into shadow shapes and were lost in the great fume of incense rising from the brazier.

O great Nature, Redemonde said, worshipped by man under different names till his eyes were turned from the kingdom of earth to the kingdom of Heaven and sin was born unto man, we, thy worshippers, implore thee to come once again to the grapple with thy rival, Sabaoth, at the edge of the chasm, for a knight who knows thee not is riding thither. O great Nature—Cybele in Phrygia, Minerva in Athens, Ceres in Eleusis, Isis in Egypt, Satan throughout Christendom—help us or see thy kingdom pass away. I bring to the brazier a waxen image, and as the wax melts,

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as the image begins to droop out of human shape, the Christian knight loses strength. The spell works well. Hold up the mirror, Gilles, that I may see whither he rides. He rides, Sir Gilles answered, towards the chasm wherein I fell. Before he reaches it, Redemonde replied, the image must pass into uncouth wax again. But the embers in the brazier are dying, Gilles; heap some more charcoal upon them quickly, for live embers are wanted to melt the wax. Two handfuls of charcoal will revive the dying embers; quickly, Gilles, quickly. Is thy faith still with the Christian God? Art betraying me? she cried, & seeing that the brazier was not giving enough heat to melt the wax she threw the image upon the dying embers.

He has crossed the chasm, Sir Gilles cried, rising from the mirror, and I have lost thee, Redemonde, and for centuries the world is delivered over to Satan's wrath. Redemonde passed from the brazier and sank upon a seat, waiting for the doom that she knew was imminent. The kingdom of Satan passes and the kingdom of the Lord God is at hand, she muttered, and Sir Gilles saw her take the Apple that Peronnik had given her from her bosom and eat. Will she not speak again? Have I lost her, have I lost her? he cried, never to see her again? And the triumph that God had won over Satan passed out of his mind, and he was about to throw himself at her

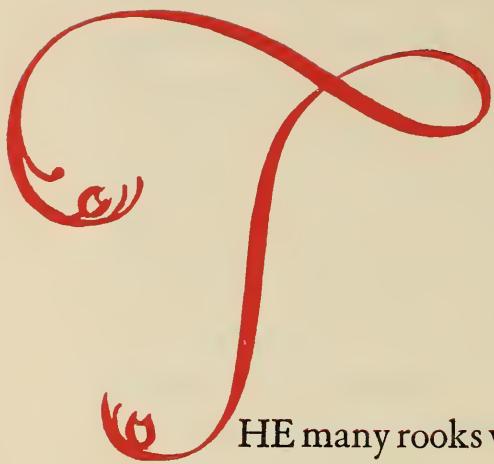
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feet and confess his betrayal when Sir Peronnik came into the temple and took the keys from the sorceress's girdle. Whither is the way? asked Sir Peronnik, and the words awoke a fierce exaltation in Sir Gilles' heart. I will point out the way, he said, through the labyrinths of the castle to the dungeon in which the Spear and the Bowl are hidden. But we shall need a lantern. We have one here, said Peronnik, displaying the Laughing Flower, and holding the Flower high like a lantern he followed Gilles out of the temple.

And their feet were barely on the steps leading to the vault when the Black Lady moved from out of the shadows of the pillars and, advancing towards Redemonde, touched her upon the shoulder. At the touch of the Plague Redemonde fell dead, and the Plague, now no more than a mote in the air, floated out of the high windows. And when Peronnik and Sir Gilles returned with the Spear and the Bowl, Gilles, said Peronnik, touch her not. Why are you weeping for her? Why askest thou me this? Sir Gilles answered. I am wondering, Peronnik replied, why men set such store on women, and of all on wicked women. Life will reveal that secret to thee sooner or later, Peronnik; mayhap never. I have no head for thinking things out, said Peronnik, but now I must return to my village and redeem my country from a cruel drought.



Chapter 4.



HE many rooks were settling themselves in the branches of the beeches when the knights came from the castle, and the rooks continued for a long while to flop home through the evening sky. Hast thou no ears for what I am saying to thee, Peronnik, and no eyes to watch for a path that might lead us to a village? I thought, answered Peronnik, that I knew all the forest, but nobody knows all the trees and dells and hill-tops in it. To which Sir Gilles made no answer, it seeming to him that he was in the power of Peronnik to lead him out of or to lose him in the forest. But, Peronnik, for what art thou loitering? Wouldst thou return to the Grey Castle and give back the Spear and the Bowl to Redemonde? The Plague has gotten her, Peronnik answered; and your lameness has departed from you, Sir Gilles. My lameness, Sir Gilles re-

plied, was part of her and has gone with her. And her spells, he added, so thoughtfully that Peronnik began to wonder if he rue'd his swinging gait and wished himself back in the old pain. But of what art thou thinking, Peronnik? Of what they are saying about me in the village, of the herd of cows I left behind before watering them at the well. There was barely half a bucket to give them, poor animals, after much winding. Would indeed that I may live to see them supping the cool stream again.

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the fool

The conqueror of Redemonde's spells thinking of cows, forgetful that he is no longer Peronnik the Fool but a knight of whom all the world will soon be talking, Sir Gilles said. One can't forget oneself all in a day and a night, Peronnik answered; nor am I thinking altogether of the cows, nor of the farmer at the head of a search party, but of the way we have lost, for the forest we're in seems more unlike my forest at every step we take. But we are in a path, said Sir Gilles, and have but to follow it. We are in a path, it is true, replied Peronnik, but who made the path? I am asking myself; not the feet of men nor of cows, but the hooves of deer. Or goats, maybe, Sir Gilles answered him. Deer, replied Peronnik. A little further on Peronnik stopped again, and spying some new tracks he said, A bear has been paddling about here. But as long as the Spear is with us no man or beast

can harm us. That is so, Sir Gilles replied. All the same, said Peronnik, it would be well for us to seek a comfortable tree, with large thick branches, where we might snooze. And fall out of, mayhap, Sir Gilles interrupted, and the Spear being up in the branches we should be eaten like common folk. And Peronnik having no reply to make, they wandered on and on in the hope of coming upon a path that would lead them to a village, till at last weariness overcame them, and, sitting down to rest, they fell asleep, forgetful of the wolves that might be about. Out of this sleep Peronnik was the first to awake, and he cried to Sir Gilles that he must come to his feet at once.

And through the dusk and through the day they fared, finding themselves sometimes in roads that seemed to lead direct to a village, but which stopped short or were lost in dense under-growths. Sometimes it seemed to them that they were by the Grey Castle; about them was the rookery, but no castle. Yet it was not carried away as a rook's nest is by a storm, said Peronnik, a great big castle built with stones half as big as an ox cart. No, it cannot have been here, he continued, that the castle stood, and I'm thinking that the sorceress's spells are upon this wood. Speak not so, Sir Gilles replied, else my courage fails me altogether. Yet here, returned Peronnik, is the rookery that we passed yester-

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evening; and a dispute arose between the twain whether it was the same rookery or another one.

And for two days more they wandered, living on berries, slaking their thirst with such water as collects in hollows, till in a quiet sundown, overworn, weary, and hopeless, they lay in the belief that the wood they were in was spellbound. We are lost beyond hope of this world or the next, said Sir Gilles, and it might be well to lie down and die without further fatigue or dread of the phantoms that have their ghostly habitation here. Let us walk into yon morass and smother in it. Do you think, said Peronnik, his soul catching fear, that a dead sorceress is a greater peril to knights than a living one? The power of the dead over the living is great, Sir Gilles replied. But your relic, Sir Gilles. My relic! I had forgotten it, Sir Gilles muttered, and forgetfulness of a relic robs it of its power. But as it is our last hope let us both put our trust in it. And together they spoke of the stars above the Sea of Galilee until the forest was black about them. After each sleep they prayed, and at dawn Peronnik said, Let us put all our faith in the relic; and since I am a knight and wandering with thee in the forest, let it be 'thou' and 'thee.' 'Thou' and 'thee' let it be then, Sir Gilles answered, till the time, not far away, when we shall bid each other good-bye forever. Speak not so lest the relic fail us, Peronnik replied.

And they wandered on till Sir Gilles fell lame, not with the old lameness which Redemonde's spells cast upon him to retain him in her service, a lameness which was that of Satan or Vulcan when they were cast out of Heaven, but a natural lameness that comes upon a man after wandering three days in a forest without rest or food. I can go no further, Peronnik, he said, laying himself upon the ground; let death come. Take away thy berries; I cannot eat. If thou canst not eat thou canst still open thine eyes, said Peronnik; look, we've wandered to within half a league of the village. Thou speakest to hearten me, said Sir Gilles. Not so, answered Peronnik; courage, Gilles, for my promise to thee is that within an hour we shall be in my village. Go thou to the village, said Sir Gilles, and I will lie here and await thy coming. And be eaten by a wolf or a bear, perhaps, replied Peronnik. No, no; we fare on to the end together.

A weary faring this last half-league was to Sir Gilles, barely able to bear the pain of his feet and the sickness of hunger. Look round thee, Gilles, said Peronnik, and tell me if we are not hard by the village. And looking round Sir Gilles answered, It seems to me that I have seen yon fields shining between these trees before. In very truth we are on the verge of the forest. At the sight of the corn Sir Gilles was again heartened, and walked steadfastly till Peronnik stopped sud-

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the fool

denly and said, Yonder! What seest thou yonder, Peronnik? Farmer Leroux, Peronnik whispered; and his knighthood fallen from him he was again Farmer Leroux's neat-herd, with no thought in his mind but how to escape from him into the forest. It was now the turn of Sir Gilles to grasp him by the arm and remind him again that he was no longer Peronnik the Fool, but the valiant knight who overcame Redemonde in her enchanted castle. And, leading him to Farmer Leroux, Sir Gilles asked him for news of a lad named Peronnik. Would indeed that I had news of him, said the farmer, for if I had I'd be quickly about my own business, which is to thrash the rascal for his desertion of the herd he was given in charge of four or five days ago. I have chosen my stoutest stick to lay across' his back, and not an inch of unblackened skin will I leave on it, and if I kill him not his luck will never desert him.

The farmer might have continued in this way for a long time if Sir Gilles had not interrupted him with these words, But thine eyes are upon him now, farmer. My eyes upon him! How am I to understand your words, sir knight? What covert meaning—I am bringing back to thee, said Sir Gilles, a knight of valiant deeds in and about the Grey Castle, the conqueror of the sorceress who cursed the land with a great drought. How bringing back to me? inquired Leroux.

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The knight who stands before thee, Sir Gilles answered, was once thy neat-herd. My Peronnik, the farmer stuttered, my Peronnik in a suit of mail! And who may you be, sir knight? I am Sir Gilles de Lacenaire, who admitted Sir Peronnik into the Order of Knighthood that he might overcome the sorceress's spells. My Peronnik, the farmer began again—No longer thy Peronnik, Sir Gilles interrupted, but a knight of whom all the world will be talking before many weeks are over, for he brings the Spear and the Bowl. But will the Spear bring down the rain that will save the rest of my herd, asked Leroux, or is it a mere spear of chivalry that concerns me not? Soon after the hurling of the Spear into the air, said Sir Gilles, the desert about us will be a green country again, fresh as in May-time. Then let the Spear be hurled at once, answered the farmer, and my poor cows put out of the pain of thirst. We have neither eaten nor drunken for three days, Sir Gilles replied; we are starving men; but as soon as we are rested— In my house yonder, cried Farmer Leroux, you will find bread and wine and cheese and butter and other things the goodwife may have in her larder. So you have gotten the Spear, the holy Spear that will bring us rain, and the story thereof will be glad in the villagers' ears. But here we are at my house, Sir Gilles; and now, wife, make ready the house to receive the

knights who have come back with the Spear that brings the rain.

And who may they be? the wife asked. First pile the table with bread and wine and cheese and butter, and strike off from the carcass above thee as much bacon as will end the hunger of men who have not eaten for three days. But this is Peronnik, our Peronnik! Thine eyes are quicker than mine, Leroux replied, and while the knights eat a tale of many marvels thou shalt hear from me. Before you, sir knights, is all my house has of meat and drink; and fall to your food, Sir Peronnik, for you will need all your strength for the hurling of the Spear. Sir Peronnik! the wife stuttered. Life is a miracle, wife, full to the brim of wonders. But take thine eyes off him and listen to his story. So Peronnik got the Spear from her, said the goodwife, which doesn't surprise me overmuch now I come to get my mind to it, for we all knew there was something wonderful in him. Begin thy story, husband. When they have eaten they will tell it, answered the farmer. We will, we will, cried the famished knights. And while they eat I'll be up the street telling the folk that Peronnik has returned with the Spear. Nor was she long away when voices began to be heard about the doorway. In a little while calls for Peronnik broke forth, and when he appeared in all his mail the villagers could not show joy enough; and before

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Peronnik had told his story the folk were telling new stories among themselves, how the sorceress's castle had been scaled and how she had come by her death. It was said, too, that Sir Gilles had overcome the magical arts of Redemonde's brother Rogéar, and that Rogéar had pronounced a great curse upon the Spear before it was captured which would bring ill luck to whomsoever possessed it.

But as long as it brings down the rain, what matter? cried a woman. The Spear may lose its virtue, cried another. What matter? cried a third, for God has conquered Satan in a last battle and he will see that we do not want for rain any more nor sunshine when we need it. At these words a great hymn of thanksgiving came upon the folk suddenly, words and music together, and till the hill-top was reached no word was spoken. If the Spear bringeth rain from yon sky, said a man, then it is God's own Spear, and the reign of Satan is over, as Marguerite Lebrun said on our way hither. And then a peasant, Pierre le Gros, spoke of the great fire that would break out in the forest if the Spear were not hurled quickly. The Spear has not come too soon, for after this drought the country would burn for months, covering the country with ashes. Hush, woman, hush, for Sir Peronnik is about to hurl the Spear.

The hurling of the Spear was the signal for

the renewal of the hymn of thanksgiving, and the crowd sang it all through the afternoon and evening; and men, women, and children were out of their beds singing to each other from window to window across the streetway till rain began to fall so heavily that they were driven back to their beds. After the first shower it seemed as if the storm were about to pass over, but after a pause the thunder crashed so loudly that in the village of Saint-Jean-de-Braie the world seemed to be overturning. The rain has come at last in right earnest, the villagers cried, returning to their beds, their ears open to the sound of water gurgling down the gutters. The folk listened, and fell asleep at last, happy in the knowledge that the Spear had saved their country from famine.

All next day it rained and all through the week. The ruts filled with water and the fields were green again with new grass. A second springtime, the villagers said; and then the rain came down fiercely and beat in the windows, and then it fell straight like a sheet. At the end of each day there were bright intervals of a few hours, but next day rain fell again and the farmers spoke of the great stock of wheat still uncarried. Our wheat will be spoilt if this rain does not cease, they said. Maybe it would have been as well for us if some of our cows had died for want of water and for us to have had our wheat.

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And July passed over and August was well begun before the rain ceased. We have rested long enough, Gilles said to Peronnik, in Saint-Jean-de-Braie. Our business is to the rescuing of honest men from thieves and maidens from lustful rogues.

When the news that the knights were leaving them was about many villagers came to Sir Peronnik to offer him in return for his services the beginning of a herd. Three young heifers are all I would ask, said Peronnik. Beware, replied Gilles, for no man returns whence he came. Thou hast entered the Order of Knighthood, and whosoever enters it never leaves it till he dies, if he leave it then. So we must on, Peronnik, taking from the village only a horse, for thou must be horsed according to thy quality. But shall we never see you again? Will you not return to us? the villagers cried as the twain rode forth. That mayhap and it may not hap; all is in the hand of God, said Sir Gilles as he waved farewell to the folk who ran alongside and between the horses; and at last to escape them he pricked on. Though we never see Saint-Jean-de-Braie again, he said, we have done deeds that will bear fruit that the folk will find sweet under the tooth for many a day.

And it was as Sir Gilles foresaw, for during the winter of the same year the folk of Saint-Jean-de-Braie were telling the story of a beleaguered city

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in which Sir Peronnik fed the starving and with his lance routed the French. And the next year further exploits were related—that Sir Peronnik had conquered Anjou, Poitou, and Normandy, and was away now on the Crusades winning great triumphs over the Saracens, obliging Saladin to accept baptism and give to him his daughter in marriage. The years went by, and it became common gossip in Saint-Jean-de-Braie that the Saracen lady had borne him a hundred sons and that he had given to each a kingdom to rule over. And as the years passed over and generations came and went it came to be believed in Saint-Jean-de-Braie that by virtue of the Golden Bowl Sir Peronnik and many of his sons were still living. And then heresies, or shadows of heresies, came over. Whence they came none knew, but it was whispered certainly by a sceptical generation that the enchanter Rogéar at last won the Spear and the Bowl back from the Christians, that he has them now, and that anybody who wants them may go and search for them like Peronnik the Fool.



Brace Rogers

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